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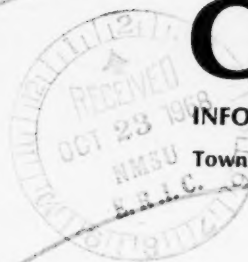
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ABSTRACT

Protestant approaches to church problems in rural areas are presented in this study guide for Catholics. The Protestant "town and country" movement is described in terms of the beginnings of the movement, early leaders, denominational programs, early theory and practice, the movement today, changes in rural America, dissatisfaction, and willingness to face the implications of change. Three major approaches characterize the attempt to meet Protestant goals: attracting and training a more capable ministry, overall planning for larger areas, and promoting local cooperative effort. Listed methods for overall planning include larger parishes, denominational community churches, church union, denominational cooperation, and inter-denominational cooperation. Denominational policies on ecumenical cooperation for some denominations are described. Major conclusions are that the town and country apostolate is an important area of Catholic concern, that from the Protestant point of view the town and country is over-churched while from the Catholic point of view it is under-churched, that the Protestant leaders are searching for solutions which they recognize to be both difficult and complex, and that a continued interest in the problems and progress of the Protestant town and country movement is one aspect of the Catholic search for effective Christian witness. A selected bibliography of recent materials is included. (PS)

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Town & Country Report #1

THE PROTESTANT APPROACH TO TOWN AND COUNTRY



A
Study-Guide
for
Catholics

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THE PROTESTANT APPROACH TO TOWN & COUNTRY

A Study-Guide for Catholics

by

Bernard Quinn, D. Ms.

Town & Country Reports - No. 1
Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA)
1717 Massachusetts Avenue, N. W., Washington, D.C. 20036
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FOREWORD

CARA is happy to make available through its "Information Service" this study-guide for Catholics on "The Protestant Approach to Town & Country." Prepared by Rev. Bernard Quinn, D.Ms., Coordinator of CARA's Town & Country Department, it is the first in a series of CARA reports designed to assist the church in modernizing the forms of its town and country apostolate -- a mission directed to the 67 million Americans living in non-metropolitan areas outside of cities, suburbs, and the urban fringe.

The objectivity and ecumenical spirit of the author's presentation will, we believe, readily recommend this study-guide as a sound introductory document to clergy and laity concerned with the religious future of non-metropolitan America. In commenting to Father Quinn on his report, Dr. C. Wilson Brumley, Secretary of the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, has stated: "In the context of your essay we believe that you fairly present our working stance in rural and urban areas." Dr. Henry A. McCanna, Director for Town & Country, Department of Church Renewal, National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., has expressed his appreciation for "the excellent way" in which this paper "comprehends the Protestant approach to Town & Country."

Although town and country problems cannot realistically be considered in isolation from the overall problem of American urbanization, very real differences requiring specialized attention will continue to exist. They cannot and must not be ignored if the church's mission is to become more relevant to the rural areas. As Dr. Shirley Greene has warned, we should not allow the fact that our society is rapidly urbanizing to lead us to a kind of "urban fundamentalism" since "the actual facts are much more complex and pluralistic than this urbanization thesis assumes."

Clearly there has been a change in rural life and a breakdown in small town values in America since the early 1930's, and this process continues to accelerate. For the church this process presents a serious challenge, for we are called upon to redeem and reform this change process by inserting ultimate Christian meaning into the newly emerging town and country way of life.

This means, I would suggest, that the church must seek deeper insight into the Christian mission as it applies to rural America, must provide the ministry of Word and Sacrament where this is lacking, and make it more effective where it already exists.

The church, moreover, must examine its own organizational structure so that its ministry becomes truly available and acceptable to every person within every institution that forms the fabric of rural life.

Also, I would add, means of ecumenical cooperation must be sought in an effort to strengthen the overall Christian witness. A deeper understanding must be achieved concerning the attitudes, values, social structures, and regional differences which affect people's religious development. And finally,

there must be careful and controlled experimentation in an effort to discover new approaches to today's needs.

To achieve these goals will require research for the town and country apostolate. CARA is grateful to the Glenmary Fathers' Town & Country Religious Research Center, which early in 1967 moved to the Center's headquarters and became our Town & Country Department. The professional competence and zeal of this unit enables us to serve the important research needs of the rural church in the United States. Currently this new CARA department is initiating research into the overall religious and social situation in town and country, which includes a solid anthropological study of a small American community focused directly on the religious problems and the channels of religious communication. At the request of Bishop John Carberry of Columbus, this department is developing the Catholic program for the ecumenical consultation on the church in non-metropolitan America scheduled this fall at Ohio State University. A number of other research projects and reports are in the proposal stage or already under way.

CARA is hopeful that its town and country research initiatives will be of value to the church and to all Americans interested in the religious, cultural, and social future of non-metropolitan America. We anticipate that this study-guide and our general town and country program will help to shed light on issues and problems that Catholics, no matter how inadvertantly, may now be neglecting.

Rev. Louis J. Luzbetak, S.V.D.
Executive Director, CARA

BEGINNINGS OF THE MOVEMENT

The modern approach to "town and country"¹ among main-line Protestants began to assume the form of a movement as a result of the report of Theodore Roosevelt's Commission on Country Life, in 1908. The Commission's report recommended a four-point program: (1) the farmer should receive more technical agricultural information; (2) general education in rural areas should be improved; (3) farmers should have stronger voluntary associations; and (4) religious institutions should be revitalized.

As a result of the general public interest stirred by the report, churches began to organize departments and programs for the rural church, and to hold denominational and interdenominational conferences; short courses for rural pastors were set up on the campuses of the land-grant colleges; and organizations of many kinds sprang up across the country, through which churchmen could contribute to a better rural life.

EARLY LEADERS

The movement produced many leaders. Malcolm Dana (1869-1940) became the first director of the Town and Country Department of the Congregational Church, where he helped develop the larger parish plan, demonstration parishes, and projects for training rural ministers. He was among the first to apply the insights of sociology to the church, and promoted programs for training rural pastors in five New England seminaries.

Charles J. Galpin (1864-1947), of the University of Wisconsin, made careful studies of the nature of the rural community, and helped to initiate the science of rural sociology.

Warren H. Wilson (1867-1937), secretary of the Department of Church and Country Life, Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., developed philosophical and practical approaches to the problems of the rural church. He perceived the

1. Denominations define "town and country" in various ways. American Baptists, Methodists, United Presbyterians, United Church of Christ, and Episcopalians include towns of 10,000 or less, away from metropolitan areas. The Lutheran Council in the U.S.A. uses a figure of 25,000; and the Southern Baptist Convention, 50,000 (Rural-Urban Missions). For a more detailed history of the rural church movement, see: C. R. McBride, Protestant Churchmanship for Rural America (Chicago: Judson Press, 1962), ch. 1-2; Mark Rich, The Rural Church Movement (Columbia, Mo.: Knoll, 1958); John H. Kolb, A Study of Rural Society (Cambridge, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin, 1952), ch. 20; Lee Taylor, Rural Life and Urbanized Society (New York: Oxford Press, 1964), pp. 407 ff.

forces of decay at work, and made a strong plea for federated churches.

Ralph A. Felton (1882-), former professor of Rural Church at Drew Theological Seminary, was a leader among Methodists, and is usually considered the dean of rural ministers.

Mark Rich (1899-1967), secretary of the Town and Country Work Department of the American Baptist Convention for many years, helped to start the School for Town and Country Ministers at Green Lake, Wisconsin, and developed over forty bulletins dealing with specific phases of the rural church ministry.

Other examples could be given, but the names of these men are sufficient to illustrate that the early rural church movement possessed a core of enlightened and vigorous leadership.

DENOMINATIONAL PROGRAMS

Strong town and country departments were established within the American and Southern Baptist Conventions, Church of the Brethren, Church of God, Disciples of Christ, Evangelical United Brethren, Lutheran Church in America, American Lutheran Church, Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Methodist Church, Episcopal Church, United Church of Christ, United Presbyterian and Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. The Commission on the Church in Town and Country of the National Council of Churches was set up to promote communication and cooperation among these and other church and secular agencies.

EARLY THEORY AND PRACTICE

Much of the movement's initial effort was expended in an attempt to prevent the demise of the rural church. "One theory behind this widespread movement was the assumption that American life could be preserved at its best only if its rural roots were preserved. And the preservation of rural roots could be assured only if the rural church remained strong."² This desire for the preservation of "rural roots" -- sometimes called agricultural fundamentalism, or rural romanticism -- was based partly on the conviction that the

2. Victor Obenhaus, The Church and Faith in Mid-America (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), p. 126. [Copyright 1963, W. L. Jenkins. Used by permission.] Cf. also: Max Lerner, America as a Civilization, vol. 1 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1966), pp. 139-155.

Christian message is particularly compatible with the traditional rural way of life, and partly on nostalgia for a bygone era. Yet both the effort to save the rural church as is, and the philosophy of agricultural fundamentalism on which this effort was based, have been called into question today.

In assessing this early rural church movement, Keene Lebold, of the Ecumenical Center of Renewal and Planning, has pointed out both its positive and negative effects. On the positive side: "Attention was called to the problem; helpful self-studies and analyses were made; leadership was trained more effectively; resources of the world (land-grant colleges) were sought out and used; the importance of the church to life in a community was called to the attention of many; the importance of family and community life was emphasized; invaluable research was done; soil and water conservation were encouraged; preservation of human resources was stressed." On the negative side: "Rural life was idealized and idolized; the town and country church building tended to become god; urban America was characterized as evil while rural America was characterized as good; rural values replaced Christian values; worship of the soil crowded out worship of the Creator; the family farm was idealized; ancestor worship (cemetery) was over-emphasized."³

THE MOVEMENT TODAY

Whatever may be said of these early efforts, a definite shift in thinking has taken place today. This shift is based on four interrelated factors:

1. Greater insight into the nature of the changes taking place in rural America.
2. Willingness to accept the implications of these changes in a realistic manner.
3. Dissatisfaction with the previous philosophy and approach.
4. Desire to present the church's witness in the most effective way.

CHANGES IN RURAL AMERICA

Dr. Shirley Greene has pointed out that it is an over-simplification to

3. Keene R. Lebold, Position Paper on the Church in Town & Country (Merom, Ind.: Ecumenical Center of Renewal and Planning, 1965), p. 5.

say that American culture has become an urban culture and that all the changes taking place in town and country are reducible to this. He feels that to attempt to impose an "urban fundamentalism" on areas in which there are at present (and will continue to be) important distinctive cultural ingredients would be to repeat the errors of the past -- merely substituting urban fundamentalism for agrarian fundamentalism. Nevertheless, definite changes have radically affected the rural picture, and brought the church to the present state of crisis. Among these changes, Dr. Greene lists: (1) the decline of agriculture; (2) the end of isolation; (3) accelerated mobility; (4) disappearance of neighborhood; (5) increase of leisure time. All this has resulted in a threat to the traditional value systems: (1) the family farm; (2) hard manual labor; (3) individualism and self-reliance; and (4) the sense of local community.⁴

WILLINGNESS TO FACE THE IMPLICATIONS OF CHANGE

Tracing the historical response of the church to the threat of change, Dr. Greene states that four major patterns have emerged. At times the church has withdrawn from the world in an attempt to preserve its own life and provide a light shining in the darkness. A second response has been for the church to attempt to dominate the world, an example of which was the attempt to create a Christendom in the middle ages, or a Calvinistic theocracy at Geneva. A third response has been conformity to the world, a situation in which the church merely blesses what is taking place in the secular order. A fourth response has been the attempt to "reform and redeem the world through the application of Christian standards of judgment and a witness to the redemptive power of God through the Holy Spirit."⁵

It is the vision of "reform and redemption" which dominates the present thinking of town and country leaders. However much they might disagree about the practical means of implementing the idea, they evidence a basic willingness to reexamine the position of the institutional church and to make the necessary adjustments. Martin E. Marty asks, "Do the decline of agriculture, the end of

4. Shirley E. Greene, "The Church Faces its Own Crisis in Relation to Community and Culture," The Church and Culture in Crisis in Town and Country, Report of the Town and Country Convocation of the United Church of Christ, 1963 (St. Louis: United Church Board for Homeland Ministries, 1963), pp. 54 ff. Cf. also: Wallace E. Ogg, "An Intensive Look at the Small Town," The Silent Struggle for Mid-America, ed. E. W. Mueller (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1963), pp. 62 ff.; John C. Matthew, "From the Holy Earth to the Secular City," Town and Country Church, No. 191 (November-December, 1966), 13.

5. Greene, p. 51.

isolation, the acceleration of mobility, the loss of neighborliness, the increase of leisure form permanent barriers to fellowship or are they only threats to an institution in which I have placed much faith? Could it be that the death of some of these forms might provide new life for a church in crisis? Was what I considered to be permanent and normative just an episode and an exception in human history?"⁶ The response among town and country leaders evidences a very real and basic willingness to answer "yes".

DISSATISFACTION

There is dissatisfaction not only with the old philosophy of agricultural fundamentalism, and efforts to maintain the traditional type of rural church at all costs, but also with the very terms in which the problem has come to be defined.

Dr. Paul Meadows criticizes the church for its over-identification with a fundamentalist rural philosophy: "...Is our ethics to be agriculturally oriented? Is it going to be nineteenth century oriented? Or is it going to be oriented to the excellence of human development made possible by automation? I have a feeling that the ethics of the church is still rooted in the nineteenth century labor, nineteenth century industrialism, nineteenth century machine technology. I don't think you have even begun in the church to come to grips with the moral possibilities of automation..."⁷ Most town and country leaders have abandoned the effort to preserve the traditional rural way of life as the "last bulwark of a Christian civilization" in an urbanized and technological society. They do not feel that the new basis of town and country life has been fully formulated as yet; but the effort to achieve such a formulation is a matter for their continuing concern.⁸

Church leaders have also come to realize that the traditional country church cannot continue to have life pumped into it from the outside. Financial difficulties are part of the problem -- the inability of many small rural congregations to support a minister.⁹ But a more basic concern is for obedience to Christ, who would have the church structure itself to serve humanity in a way that is truly effective.

Rural sociologists have long pointed out that many country areas are

6. Martin E. Marty, "The Church Faces its Own Crisis in its Own Life as Fellowship and Institution," The Church and Culture..., p. 45.

7. Paul Meadows, panel discussion, The Church and Culture..., p. 34. Cf. also: Obenhaus, p. 17.

8. Cf. The Church in Town and Country Areas, ed. Marvin T. Judy (Dallas: Southern Methodist University, 1961), pp. 14, 22 ff.

9. Cf. James McLeod Carr, Working Together in the Larger Parish (Atlanta: Church and Community Press, 1960), p. 2 ff.

over-churched, and their ministries under-specialized.¹⁰ And critics within the church, such as Colin Williams, have repeated the point with emphasis: "The church has placed itself with man. Not at the point where he is learning to come to grips with the future, but where he is trying to give himself that nostalgic bridge which gives him roots of security in the past... But let me speak frankly -- the greater sinners here are not just suburban churches but rural churches. You know very well and there is no need for me to spell it out. The rural church itself is the plainest case of institutional disobedience in American life. Every other institution is in some way beginning to come to grips with the new urban technological culture which is penetrating the rural world, but the one place where rural man doesn't have to face the future is in the church! We have got as many little rural church-places now as we had when the population was much bigger. In many places they have consolidated everything else, but not our church -- there we can be nostalgic to the full. This disobedience is heretical because it refuses to see God as the living God of history, and we have got to be honest enough to confess our sins."¹¹ By now the analysts and critics have made their point: no longer can rural leaders realistically set before themselves the goal of maintaining the country church as it has traditionally been conceived.

Dissatisfaction has also manifested itself about the way in which the problem has come to be stated. The point was made before that rural change is not merely a question of increasing urbanization. Urbanization is a reality, but this reality does not entirely overshadow other elements which -- however transformed -- will continue to warrant distinct consideration for town and country areas.

On the other hand, the church's rural ministry cannot be conceived and planned entirely apart from the ministry as a whole, including the urban ministry. There are many points of difference, it is true; but there are also points where interests coincide and interlock. The specific needs of town and country must receive proper emphasis within the overall planning process; but these concerns must also be integrated into the total picture.¹²

It is for this reason that the Commission on the Church in Town and Country of the National Council of Churches is in process of evolving into a rural and urban "Section on Church and Community." This reflects the restructuring that is now taking place within many denominations, and is basically an

10. Cf., for example: Taylor, p. 409; Kolb, p. 361.

11. Colin W. Williams, "Dialogue on Issues and Trends," The Church Meeting Human Needs, Report of the 1964 National Convocation on the Church in Town and Country, ed. Henry A. McCanna (New York: National Council of Churches, 1964), p. 107.

12. Cf. Methodism and the Mission in Town and Country America, Report to the 24th annual meeting of the Board of the Missions of the Methodist Church, 1964 (New York: Board of National Missions, 1964), pp. 17, 26; The Church in Town and Country Areas, p. 17; Francena L. Nolan, "Values and Goals in Rurban Society," New Thousands in Town and Country: Concern of the Church (Chicago: Lutheran Council in the U.S.A., 1962), p. 106.

attempt to meet the town and country problem as defined in a new way.

A MORE EFFECTIVE WITNESS

Evident in the literature of the present movement is the sincere desire for a more effective Christian witness. The leaders have become increasingly aware that the religious situation in these areas leaves much to be desired. (If the evidence of religious illiteracy and Biblical ignorance as reported by Victor Obenhaus in his study of a rural county is at all typical, the situation is serious indeed.)¹³

It is this urge to meet the truly religious needs of the individual and community that underlies the current concern, rather than any selfish desire to preserve the local institution for its own sake. Shubert Frye, of the United Presbyterian Church, writes: "The fire of need is spreading in the wind. The church is there -- more than half of our United Presbyterian congregations are there! They have work to do. They are calling for help as they face radically new questions and decisions. Some are still asking, 'How can we survive?' Their real question is, 'How can we find renewal of commitment to the cause of Christ, which will open for us the will and the way to serve the needy people in our communities and in the world?'"¹⁴ And E. W. Mueller, of the Lutheran Council in the U.S.A., says: "When a congregation is faced with the need of making adjustments, it must give much thought to the mission of the church. Why is the Lutheran Church on the scene? If we define this mission to be the preserving of the facilities that our forefathers built we will make certain decisions and certain choices. If we define our mission as extending the Kingdom of God, then we will use our pastoral leadership, the resources that we have in our lay people, and the facilities that we have and can provide to the best advantage to proclaim the Gospel of Christ."¹⁵

Finally, there is a new willingness to serve the entire community, not just those who are actual or potential members of the church. "The area or scope of concern includes all the people in our area, inside and outside the church, and the real problems they have as individuals, families, and communities.

13. Obenhaus, ch. 5-6, pp. 23, 24, 154, 161. Cf. also: Marty, p. 49; Arthur J. Vidich and Joseph Bensman, Small Town in Mass Society (New York: Doubleday, 1960), ch. 9.

14. G. Shubert Frye, Witness in Crisis (New York: United Presbyterian Church, 1965), p. 4.

15. E. W. Mueller, Congregational Development vs. Congregational Action (Chicago: Lutheran Council in the U.S.A.), p. 1.

and lived, to the end that in us and through us Christ might redeem and transform..."¹⁶

TOWARDS A SOLUTION

Three major approaches characterize the attempt to meet these goals: (1) attracting and training a more capable ministry; (2) overall planning for larger areas; and (3) promoting local cooperative effort.

THE MINISTRY

Basic to the realization of a truly effective witness is the need for a capable and imaginative ministry. Unfortunately the idea is current that the rural ministry is merely a stepping-stone to the city church, and that the best men do not remain permanently in town and country work.¹⁷ This image is gradually undergoing a change, however, as the leadership succeeds in presenting a challenge to young ministers who desire to make the rural ministry a life's work, and who view it as a significant opportunity for witness.¹⁸

A great deal of effort has been expended on continuing education programs for rural ministers. The resources of the land-grant colleges have been utilized to acquaint ministers with the current economic, social, and cultural changes which affect their work. Annual courses and workshops are offered on such campuses as Michigan State, University of Wisconsin, University of West Virginia, North Carolina State, University of Kentucky, Colorado State, South Dakota State, Mississippi State, University of Missouri, and Iowa State. Most denominations also conduct their own annual workshop programs and publish the results. The Lutherans have a particularly outstanding program of workshops, and have published materials relating to just about every important rural section of the

16. Ideas for Church Leaders Interested in Workshops for Town and Country Areas, ed. August W. Engelbrecht (Chicago: Lutheran Council in the U.S.A., 1965), p. 31. Cf. also: E. W. Mueller, "What Can We Accomplish Now Ecumenically?", Ecumenical Relations in Town and Country: Notes and Reports, National [Episcopal] Town and Country Conference, 1966 (Kansas City, Mo.: Roanridge Conference Center, 1966), p. 24.

17. Obenhaus, p. 162

18. Charles DeVries, Inside Rural America: A Lutheran View (Chicago: Lutheran Council in the U.S.A.), p. 9.

United States.¹⁹ In addition, ministers have available the results of inter-denominational convocations on town and country which have been held annually since 1943.

All this has served to highlight the significance of the town and country work, not only for the minister, but for the church as a whole.

OVERALL PLANNING FOR LARGER AREAS

"We laid out the organizational map of America in three centuries of the conquests of the country largely in terms of the capabilities of a horse-drawn technology... The striking fact -- especially since the close of World War II -- is that we have undergone a technological revolution in all phases of our employment, e.g., farm techniques, highways, and computer technologists. All of these things add up to very greatly increasing the minimum size of every feasible type of organization -- the size of the school, the size of the church, the size of the shopping center, or the size of a proficient unit of local government. The demand for proficient minimum unit organization is much larger than it used to be."²⁰

In view of these technological changes, the churches are beginning to think in terms of planning for areas larger than the individual village or town. There is an effort to promote the concept of Functional Economic Area (FEA) as the basic planning unit for all types of services -- education, government, community development, consumer, economic, social, and religious. The concept of FEA, as developed by Karl A. Fox of Iowa State University, recognizes that rural people now fulfill some needs in one place, and some in another. The FEA is the total area within which people fulfill all of their basic needs. The crossroads town is a convenience shopping center; the slightly larger town provides all ordinary consumer services; the towns of 5,000 to 10,000 serve as a complete shopping center, and the small city provides wholesale and other major services. Taken together these centers comprise a Functional Economic Area. The total size of each FEA will vary according to the particular population distribution within a given section of the United States. But in the mid-west, for example, it is estimated that FEA's will extend for about a hundred miles and will contain approximately 100,000 people.

Town and country leaders are now encouraging sociologists to develop this concept. Planning at the FEA level will not, of course, replace the necessity for strictly local planning. But if the concept does develop and becomes accepted, churches -- as well as other agencies -- will possess a basic planning unit within which to integrate, coordinate, and expand their services

19. DeVries, pp. 26 ff.

20. John M. Brewster, "Dialogue on Issues and Trends," The Church Meeting Human Needs, p. 101.

to the total human community.²¹ The church will then be able not only to minister more effectively to the spiritual needs of the "community of residence," but will be able to provide various specialized ministries within area and regional social structures which today are assuming ever-increasing importance in daily life.

LOCAL COOPERATIVE EFFORTS

The movement's present approach puts heavy stress on the importance of local and regional cooperation within each denomination and across denominational lines. It is felt that only cooperative effort will enable the churches to marshal all the resources for truly effective witness.

Cooperation must be based on interior spiritual renewal and commitment to Christ; otherwise it will neither succeed nor provide an adequate witness.²² On this principle all would agree; the area of disagreement concerns the nature and method of the cooperative effort itself.

Not surprisingly, the position of town and country leaders reflects their own denominational stance towards the ecumenical movement as a whole. There is, therefore, sharp disagreement, especially between those who stress personal evangelism and those who stress the ecumenical approach. Although evangelism and ecumenism are not considered to be necessarily mutually exclusive, the difference in emphasis is sharp enough to cause divergence in attitudes toward cooperation.

EVANGELICAL POINT OF VIEW

Among the groups who stress the church's task of personal evangelism, the Southern Baptists are the most important. They see cooperative effort among Christians as essential to effective witness, but they wish to achieve "cooperation without compromise."²³

21. Cf. E.W. Mueller, "What Is Happening in the Countryside?" Lutheran Quarterly (February, 1966); E. W. Mueller, "What Can We Accomplish Now...", p. 24; Judy, p. 15 ff.

22. Cf. Lebold, p. 7; McBride, p. 120; The Church Meeting Human Needs, p. 104.

23. Cf. James DeForest Murch, Cooperation Without Compromise (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956); Paulus Scharpf, History of Evangelism (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964).

The type of cooperation they visualize is based on mutual respect and unity of spirit among all the redeemed. This unity of spirit is to express itself by working together with other Christians in every effort which does not compromise distinctive Baptist witness. Cooperation will be principally of an informal type, as opposed to the formal, structured cooperation required by participation in the World or National Council of Churches, in national or local church mergers, or the closer type of formalized cooperation among congregations of different denominations.

Although repudiating almost every variety of structured organizational effort, the cooperation visualized by Baptists is nonetheless very real. As William R. Estep states, "...Baptists are far more involved in the ecumenical movement than their limited affiliation with the various national councils and the World Council might indicate. The nature of this involvement is more informal than formal, but the resultant dialogue, in which Baptists are engaged with the remainder of Christendom, may be just as meaningful, or even more so, than an unequivocal support of ecumenical organizations would provide."²⁴

Why do most Southern Baptists feel that formal ecumenical cooperation is not the answer to a more effective evangelical witness? Here are some reasons: (1) Baptists take the historical nature of revelation seriously, and they feel that among ecumenists liberal theology and de-emphasis on the Bible as the inspired word of God have greatly weakened the evangelical thrust towards personal commitment to Christ. (2) Hierarchical organizational patterns which would subject the local congregation to obedience are not in accordance with the New Testament plan; there is no scriptural warrant for this type of organic visible unity among all Christians. And in fact, the desire for such unity is not immune from a certain prideful temptation to earthly power. (3) Emphasis on the social gospel among many ecumenists has tended to crowd out evangelical concern. (4) There is no evidence to suggest that organic unity has actually increased the power of Christian witness, or that it wins more men to Christ. (A case in point is the current decrease in missionaries among groups related to the ecumenical movement, and the remarkable increase among those who are not.) Separate denominations within the Church of Christ serve a useful purpose, providing a system of checks and balances, and exercising a purifying effect that is beneficial to all.²⁵

An illustration of the practical implementation of these principles may be found in the long-range goals suggested by the Rural-Urban Missions Department of the Southern Baptist Convention. Goals for the twenty-five year period 1954-1978 are:

1. All Southern Baptist pastors adequately trained and supported, living in the community, and giving their entire time to the field.
2. Each rural church of the Southern Baptist Convention properly

24. William R. Estep, Baptists & Christian Unity (Nashville: Broadman, 1966), p. 169. For a discussion of the Southern Baptists' position, cf. p. 143 ff.

25. Ibid., pp. 168 ff.

located, having adequate grounds and facilities to meet the needs of the community.

3. Every Southern Baptist rural church seeking to make the greatest possible contribution in lifting the level of the total life of the community.

4. Every Southern Baptist rural church teaching the Bible plan of stewardship; giving a percentage of its total budget to missions through the Cooperative Program, and increasing the percentage each year.

5. The expansion of the Southern Baptist rural work to make a church accessible to the people of every community in our Convention area.

6. The Long-Range Program cooperating with minority groups, such as Indians, Spanish-speaking, and Negroes, in the development of their rural churches and mission stations.

7. That all our Southern Baptist colleges and seminaries include in their curricula specialized courses in community life and development and practical training of rural leadership.

Specific goals for the five-year period beginning in 1965 are as follows:

1. Every rural church maintaining a full-time educational program, such as Sunday School, Training Union, Brotherhood, Music, Vacation Bible School.

2. Every rural church conducting a mission Vacation Bible School, if possible.

3. Every part-time rural church sharing the services of a pastor with another church or churches.

4. Every financially and numerically weak church studying the possibility of uniting with other Baptist churches in declining communities to strengthen the Baptist witness and to provide an adequate salary for the pastor.

5. Every rural church holding at least one revival each year and reporting baptisms annually to the association.

6. Twenty-five percent of the rural church participating in the Church Development Ministry to achieve the objectives of the Great Commission.

7. Ten thousand rural pastors engaged in some type of in-service training sponsored by the denomination during this period.

8. Twenty-five percent increase in rural churches and their pastors participating in one of the programs of the Annuity Board.

9. Fifteen thousand rural churches subscribing to their state Baptist papers through church budget plan.

10. Every rural church recognizing that God uniquely calls men to the gospel ministry and affording such men called of God opportunities to exercise their gifts.

11. Every rural church emphasizing Biblical preaching, moral integrity, denominational loyalty, and world missions.

12. Ninety percent of all rural churches operating with an annual budget, stressing tithing, sending regular (weekly, monthly, or quarterly) contributions on a percentage basis to associational missions and to world missions through the Cooperative Program.²⁶

The Southern Baptists' program places stress on the development of an adequate rural ministry, on the effort to bring about personal commitment to Christ, on denominational loyalty, and foreign mission work. It also includes concern for the total community, and presupposes cooperation and unity of spirit among Christian groups, insofar as this can take place without compromise of conviction. The program represents one major approach within the town and country movement to revitalize evangelical witness and make the church a truly effective religious force in the community.

ECUMENICAL APPROACH

Most denominations affiliated with the National Council of Churches take a radically different approach. While they all stress the importance of personal evangelism, they are much more aware of the urgency of inserting Christianity into all meaningful community structures by means of the social gospel. They look at the situation in the town and country and conclude that the church is not adequately structured at present to meet the challenge of a secular world. Christians must pool their resources and actively seek close ecumenical cooperation according to the mind of Christ, cooperation which does not rule out the possibility of world, national, or local church mergers. Even before such organic unity comes about, churches should cooperate as closely as possible to the extent that renewal of spirit and the current status of theological dialogue will permit. "What will be satisfying is the honest portrayal to the world of reuniting Christian churches which do not compete but do accept and support each other and which -- this is the most important of all--

26. Nationwide Rural Church Conference, 1966 (Atlanta: Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1966), pp. 6-7.

carry on together their mission of serving and saving through word and work in the world."²⁷

In terms of practical programs there are a variety of approaches to ecumenical cooperation on the local level.²⁸

Cooperation among individuals

Cooperation among churches

Denominational

Yoked fields

Larger parish, or group ministry

Inter-denominational

Committees with single or multiple function

Local councils of churches

Yoked fields

Union churches

Larger parish, or group ministry

Church union

Federation

Denominational community churches

Multi-denominational community churches

Non-denominational community churches

Individual cooperation is best exemplified by the local ministerial association, which offers an example of a cooperative spirit, and often paves the way for closer unity.

Cooperation within a denomination often takes the form of a yoked field, whereby two or more churches which meet separately are served by the same pastor. (Corresponding Catholic practice would be a rural pastor serving a center and outlying stations.) A larger parish is a group of churches of the same denomination working together through a unified council and staff to provide a diversified ministry. (A similar Catholic practice would be one pastor and assistants working in a center and several surrounding stations.)

Inter-denominational cooperation includes committees organized to carry out single or multiple functions, such as Thanksgiving services, church censuses, hospital ministry, etc. Local councils of churches promote cooperation and communication, and offer specialized services in developing programs, but without exercising authority. A yoked field means that one pastor serves congregations of different denominations. A union church exists when two or more religious groups jointly own houses of worship, but conduct separate services and programs. This was an early form of church cooperation, which has

27. Martin E. Marty, Church Unity and Church Mission (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), p. 27. [Used by permission.]

28. Cf. Ralph L. Williamson, "Cooperation among Churches in Town and Country," in Methodism and the Mission in Town and Country, pp. 67 ff.

not been considered too successful. The inter-denominational larger parish exists when congregations work together through a unified council composed of lay and clerical representatives of various churches.

A federated church is a union of two or more local congregations of different denominations to form one congregation, but with membership, benevolences, and other relationships retained with each denomination.²⁹ A community church seeks to be the only congregation in the neighborhood and to serve all the people. Community churches may be denominational if formally affiliated with only one church, multi-denominational if affiliated with several, or non-denominational if affiliated with none. Denominational community churches come into being through comity agreements regarding unchurched areas, or through withdrawal, when one church -- usually the weaker -- agrees to withdraw and leave property and members to the stronger church. Multi-denominational churches are usually found at the site of government constructions projects in the far West. Non-denominational churches have developed in suburbs (occasionally in town and country) and are often hampered by dependence on denominations for ministers, loss of missionary outreach, and lack of contact with the wider Christian community.

Among these varying forms of cooperation, two are presently receiving major emphasis among ecumenically-minded town and country leaders: the larger parish and the denominational community church.

THE LARGER PARISH

"The larger parish is a plan or organization through which two or more churches located in the same general community area cooperate to provide for each church individually, and for the churches jointly, a better total church program than they can provide if they work independently of each other. The churches are organized into a parish after a careful study of the total program of the churches and a survey of the total religious needs of the community."³⁰

According to Clayton Pepper, there are three main types of larger parishes: "(1) The closely integrated type, either denominational or inter-denominational, with its multiple staff of specialists, responsible to a lay council of representatives from the cooperating congregations, and working under a unified budget for the Parish. (2) The loosely integrated type, either denominational or inter-denominational, with a group of cooperative pastors working together for the total religious welfare of the area, with the advice of a

29. In 1950 there were 603 federated churches in the United States. Cf. Ralph L. Williamson, Federated Churches: A Study of Success and Failure (Ithaca, N.Y.: Rural Church Institute, 1950).

30. Carr, p. 7. Cf. also: Clayton Pepper, Greater Ministries through Larger Parishes (Valley Forge, Pa.: American Baptist Home Mission Societies, 1966), p. 1; Methodism and the Mission in Town and Country, p. 41 ff.; McBride, p. 131 ff.; Marvin Judy, The Larger Parish and Group Ministry (Nashville: Abingdon, 1959); Mark Rich, Handbook on Local Church Intercooperation (Columbia, Mo.: Missouri Council of Churches, 1961).

Parish Council of lay representatives from the congregations -- each pastor being supported by the congregation or congregations he serves, but each also accepting certain parish-wide responsibilities. (The 'group ministry' is really another term for this type of parish.) (3) The 'one-man Larger Parish,' with only one paid minister, serving several congregations, but carrying on a diversified ministry through trained and lay leaders, with the total program being planned and correlated through a Parish Council of representatives from the congregations served. (The loosely integrated Larger Parish, while having some characteristics of a Yoked Field is usually somewhat more organized.)³¹

The parish council is the heart of the larger parish. It is composed of representatives from each congregation, and the extent of its decision making power (and authority over the ministers and staff) will depend on whether the parish is of a closely integrated or loosely integrated type. In any case, the council will study the needs and opportunities for service to all people within the parish boundaries, correlate the planning of the individual congregations, initiate creative ideas, and evaluate the life and work of the church. This enables the parish to conduct an effective parish-wide program of evangelism and outreach, provide specialized leadership training, adult education, and youth work, improve the quality of music and worship programs, cooperate more fully with community agencies, and provide specialized ministries to local institutions.³²

Although the original idea of the larger parish was the inter-denominational, the larger parish plan most widely used in recent years has been the denominational.³³ Because of the complexities inherent in this type of inter-denominational organization, some believe that the mortality rate of such ventures will be rather high.³⁴

THE DENOMINATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH

The disadvantage of the larger parish arrangement within a single denomination is that some people are required to go to church in a locality in which they do not live. A solution to this problem, which is steadily gaining acceptance, is the formation of a denominational community church. This means that local churches of different denominations unite into a new community church, which is affiliated with only one denomination. The other denominations simply withdraw, leaving property, facilities, and -- insofar as possible -- members to the new church. Since this retains church membership locally, it is seen as the ideal solution to the over-churched community, especially

31. Pepper, p. 2.

32. Ibid., pp. 6-12.

33. Carr, p. 8.

34. McBride, p. 133.

when the various groups are similar in background and belief.

In a recently published book, Horace Sills has given six detailed case studies of successful mergers in the small community.³⁵ The cases are: Schellsburg, Pennsylvania (United Church of Christ, Methodist, Presbyterian, Lutheran); Muscoda, Wisconsin (Presbyterian, Methodist); Broadlands, Illinois (Methodist, Evangelical United Brethren, United Church of Christ); Red Lodge, Montana (United Church of Christ, Methodist); Hamburg, Pennsylvania (Lutheran, United Church of Christ); West Valley, New York (Evangelical United Brethren, Methodist).³⁶

The story of these mergers makes fascinating reading. Common to all of them is the broad basis of support that was developed at the local level, the cooperation evidenced by denominational executives, and the spirit of unselfishness which manifests itself in the willingness of one church to lose its identity for the sake of a more effective Christian witness.

The book also contains a document entitled, "Suggested Procedures for Uniting of Churches" worked out by the Illinois Council of Churches. Both the document and the case studies will provide encouragement and practical advice for churches now contemplating such a merger. Although it is too early yet to evaluate the movement towards denominational community churches, the case studies indicate that this particular approach to the over-churched community holds great promise.

DENOMINATIONAL POLICIES ON ECUMENICAL COOPERATION

Although it will not be practical to relate in detail the town and country policies of all denominations, it will be helpful to consider a few representative examples. It must be remembered that not every local congregation is necessarily in full agreement with these policies, nor are denominational leaders willing to force them on local groups. The leaders often encourage local groups to undertake greater cooperative efforts, and stand ready to assist them with helpful advice.

UNITED PRESBYTERIANS

On September 26, 1961, Paul D. McKelvey, Moderator of the United

35. Horace S. Sills, Grassroots Ecumenicity (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1967).

36. The first-named denomination is the final affiliation.

Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. sent the following policy letter to town and country church leaders:

The Church in town and country faces a crisis. Population is decreasing in areas that are already overchurched. Thousands of churches are without pastors. Many congregations struggle without proper leadership or adequate resources with resulting ineffectual programs. The resources God has given His Church are dissipated through denominational competition and overlapping. Many congregations, immersed in tradition, care for nothing but parochial interests.

This is a crisis in town and country, not only of individual congregations. It is a crisis not only before one denomination. It is a crisis that confronts the whole Church.

The issue is clear. The Church in town and country has no choice but to make radical changes and meet new needs, or die. Local congregations must be included in the total life and strategies of their denominations. They must be led to see that:

Some churches will have to be united with other denominations to assure a strong ministry to the people;

Some churches must be dissolved;

Many churches must be related to groups such as denominational or inter-denominational larger parishes, or other types of cooperative program;

Others are desperately needed as separate congregations and must be stimulated to sturdy responsibility.

The 173rd General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. considered these alternatives at its meeting in Buffalo last May. Our Church reaffirms its "concern for a ministry to people living in town and country areas." It directed that a "new and urgent call" to cooperative mission be issued, and therefore, as Moderator of the Assembly, I hereby call upon you to join us in developing a cooperative and united ministry to fulfill our mission in town and country.

To initiate the meeting of our responsibilities, we are sending copies of this letter to the appropriate leaders in our denomination urging them to counsel with synods and presbyteries, local churches, councils of churches, and leaders of other denominations. None of us can cope with the town and country crisis alone. Shall we join together and do it?³⁷

37. Quoted in The Church and Culture in Crisis, p. 92. Cf. also: Frye, pp. 43 ff.; Crisis in Town and Country: A Call to the Church (New York: United Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., 1961); John C. Matthew, "Town and Country Goals in Transition," Town and Country Church, No. 191 (November-December 1966), 14.

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

The General Synod of the United Church of Christ adopted the following policy statement on "Local Ecumenicity in Town and Country" on December 12, 1963:

...Where different forms of institutional expression are based on differences in basic convictions concerning the essence of the Gospel, they are to be expected. Where denominational differences are the result purely of historical accident and tradition unrelated to fundamental divergence of conviction, they are wholly unjustifiable...

1. Being a denomination recognizing the principle of local congregational autonomy, we must acknowledge at the outset that we have no power to compel cooperative or ecumenical practices on the part of local congregations. We will, however, as a denomination exert all the persuasive force at our disposal to encourage attitudes and practices of ecumenicity on the part of all our congregations.
2. In view of the vast variety of specific situations in the rural scene, we reject the notion that there is any one panacea for the ills of the town and country church...
3. Recognizing the rapid and sweeping economic and sociological changes which are taking place in rural life, we are committed to the search for new and creative solutions to the problems of over-churching, under-churching and denominational competition in town and country communities; and we will seek always to conduct this search on a cooperative basis with the other denominations involved.
4. In cooperation with the Conferences, we will encourage our local congregations and help them to enter into ecumenical conversations and negotiations looking toward solutions to the problems of fragmentation of Christian witness and competition of institutional church life in town and country communities as may be appropriate, such as Federation, denominational and inter-denominational group ministry, larger parish and yoked field, denominationally-related community church through merger, withdrawal of one or more denominations (including our own) from the field...
5. As a matter of policy the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries, through the Department of the Church in Town and Country of the Division of Church Extension, will seek through mutual negotiation to avoid denominationally competitive aid to local situations except as the strength flowing from such aid is being applied to the achievement of an ecumenical solution to the competitive situation.
6. Our denomination seeks to cooperate fully in the work of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., its several divisions and units. Our Conferences continue to work in cooperation with state and area councils of churches on all appropriate matters including problems

of ecumenicity in town and country. In the same spirit, we will encourage our local congregations to cooperate fully with each other and with state, county and local councils of churches and ministerial associations and also other unrelated bodies in all studies, programs and projects designed to achieve a more effective united Christian witness to the community and more efficient institutional structures for the accomplishment of the Christian mission to rural society.³⁸

METHODISTS

Although interested in local church mergers across denominational lines, Methodists have made a special effort to develop the larger parish group ministry within their own denomination. Although no ready-made pattern for group ministry is suitable for all local situations, they feel that there are certain general principles which apply:

1. Area Service Ministry as the goal: A full, well-rounded program of church life and Christian development available to all within a defined parish area which has natural, actual, or potential community characteristics. Most parish areas would involve central towns with satellite communities or neighborhoods. The emphasis is upon a full ministry to all people within the area.
2. A well qualified and capable leadership team to provide fully ordained and trained clergy for all of the people in the parish at all times. In most cases a pastoral team would be used; however, in a few cases one pastor would serve the parish with lay leadership help. The team typically would involve a pastor-director with associates who are each appointed to specific portions of the defined parish and who cooperate as a team under the director's guidance.
3. A parish organizational structure related to a program council representing all churches in the parish would be the heart of mission and program planning. The structure will vary, but should be as simple as possible to fulfill all basic functions needed for mission achievement and lead to a consciousness of parish effectiveness. Something of a parish-wide or charge-wide commission plan of program structure would be the logical pattern to use. Such parish-wide or charge-wide commissions would be related to the cooperative program council.
4. The parish would seek to develop inter-denominational or ecumenical relationships whenever possible to enhance mission achievement.

38. Local Ecumenicity in Town and Country: A Policy Statement of the United Church of Christ (St. Louis: United Church Board of Homeland Ministries, 1963).

5. Such parish development must evolve through processes of local decision-making guided by the fullest cooperative assistance of administrative leadership from the annual conference, thus providing assurance of stability and longevity even though annual conference administrative offices change.³⁹

Experience has demonstrated that only about 50% of Methodist group ministry projects are successful.⁴⁰ A study of 74 larger parishes by the Rev. Daniel M. Schores revealed that the reasons for success or failure were to be found chiefly in the area of interpersonal relationships. He recommended: (1) advance preparation of the leadership; (2) greater involvement of the laity in initiating the idea; (3) inter-denominational consultation in view of possible church mergers before the Methodist larger parish takes final form; (4) accurate job descriptions for council members; (5) clarification of long-range and short-range objectives; (6) opportunity for seminarians to learn about the cooperative approach to churching rural areas.⁴¹

LUTHERANS

As outlined by Dr. E. W. Mueller of the Lutheran Council in the U.S.A., the philosophy for town and country churches includes these items:

Bearing witness to the nature and activities of the Triune God is the life of the Church.

To strengthen the church's ministry in town and country does not call for a new program or additional items on its program, but additional points of emphasis which encourage the congregation to do more effectively that to which it is committed.

The church must practice intelligent neglect. There are more things to do than it can get done. It must neglect the right things.

Each denomination cannot have a congregation in every town and country community. When proper it must bear witness by seeking to strengthen the ministry of other Christ exalting churches.⁴²

Elaborating his views on church cooperation in a talk given to Episcopalian town and country leaders in 1966, Dr. Mueller stated:

39. Methodism and the Mission in Town and Country, p. 39.

40. Ibid., p. 42.

41. Ibid., pp. 64 ff.

42. DeVries, pp. 15-16. This booklet presents an over-view of the remarkable accomplishments of the town and country leadership within the Lutheran Church since 1945.

Denominations are still needed to carry out the ministry of the Church. They are here, and I make no apology for them. We have to work with them. In areas of Europe, such as Scandinavia, where there is only one denomination, church life is not necessarily at its highest expression; unity does not necessarily improve the quality of ministry.

Ecumenicity...may mean different things to different people, but here is my definition. Ecumenicity means that we --

1. relate to other people, and have the opportunity to the best of our ability to articulate what we believe, the convictions we hold, and to be listened to with respect.
2. We want you to do the same, to articulate your convictions so we can listen and understand. We need to state our differences more adequately.
3. We must relate to the total Christian enterprise meaningfully, using an ecumenical approach when appropriate for those things we can best do together. This is not a "least common denominator" approach. The Church must be seen as the Body of Christ with many parts. One-ness and wholeness are not the same; the Body has wholeness when all parts meaningfully function in relationship to each other, in behalf of the total Christian enterprise.

As a Lutheran, I am not sure what you mean by an "ecumenical ministry." This does not fit with the Lutheran conception of the sacraments and teaching functions of the church. This may not be a problem with others, but I am sure it would be with us and probably for Episcopalians as well. As a general practice, I do not join with others for either worship or indoctrination, for if we are willing to do this, there is no further need to exist as a denomination. Rather than emphasize an ecumenical ministry I would rather emphasize an ecumenical approach toward building quality community.

Now in fact, there are too many churches in Town and Country communities, and the witness of the church would be strengthened by closing many congregations. It has been statistically documented that in many rural areas there are too many churches for the population, none can do the job adequately, too much is spent, and too little received in return. This is like the situation where many farms are too small to support adequate family life. In some places, there are too many churches of the same denomination in an area, including one county in Wisconsin with 30 Lutheran Churches. Some need to be merged or closed, and this needs to be done in a way which is a growth experience for the people, rather than a sense of defeat.

There are certain things a denomination must do which are basic to its life, and they must be done alone. There are others that are not basic, and these can be shared. Can we define which functions are basic and which are not? For example, much youth recreation can be done together, since there is no Lutheran or Episcopal way to play basketball. The same thing applies to community action programs. The sacraments and

teaching the faith are different.⁴³

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Policies and programs of many other denominations could be cited, but these will suffice to indicate the nuances of approach among ecumenically oriented groups.

WORK OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES OF CHRIST

Up to the present time the National Council has served the movement through its Commission on the Church in Town and Country. Twenty-four churches held memberships in this commission; Dr. Henry A. McCanna, of the NCC staff, served as Director; and Rev. W. Francis Allison (Episcopalian) as Chairman. Quarterly meetings were held, and the work of the Commission focused on six areas:

1. Interchurch Relations - helping constituent denominations to promote their respective town and country policies and programs and to coordinate them with each other. This was accomplished through meetings, national conferences, and publication of the Town and Country Church.
2. Regional Concerns - working with such regional organizations as the Commission on Religion in Appalachia (CORA), and the Great Plains Inter-Religious Commission.
3. Leadership Development - helping to promote continuing education programs for town and country clergymen, such as those conducted by some 25 Land-Grant colleges and universities.
4. Response to Change - participating in such programs as that of the Committee on the World Food Crisis, the Freedom from Hunger Campaign, and various poverty and social action programs.
5. Experimental Programs - serving such projects as the Delta Ministry, and the Ecumenical Center of Renewal and Planning, Merom, Indiana (see below); and promoting needed research.
6. Relationship with Other Agencies - maintaining contact with organizations such as the Boy Scouts, the NCC Anti-Poverty Task Force, the Soil Stewardship Advisory Committee, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The NCC Commission has to its credit an imposing list of accomplishments

43. E. W. Mueller, "What Can We Accomplish Now...", pp. 21-22.

especially in the area of promoting a warm spirit of cooperation among town and country leaders. In an effort to achieve even greater effectiveness, however, the Commission has recently been incorporated into a new NCC "Section on Church and Community," which includes the concerns of the urban ministry as well. This does not mean that the NCC is placing less emphasis on town and country work. Rather it implies the recognition that rural problems cannot realistically be considered in isolation from the overall concerns of the apostolate. Very real differences between urban life and town and country life still do exist, and will continue to exist; yet the challenges of both ministries must be studied and met within the total context of American religious life. The new NCC Section on Church and Community will become an effective instrument for this purpose.

A RESOURCE CENTER FOR TOWN AND COUNTRY RENEWAL

It would not be proper to conclude this study without mentioning the work of the Ecumenical Center of Renewal and Planning, at Merom, Indiana. Sponsored jointly by the National Council of Churches and by ten denominations, the Center seeks to offer assistance to rural congregations within an 150-mile radius, as they plan for spiritual renewal and ecumenical cooperation. The staff offers research and planning assistance to the local church community, and encourages persons involved in renewal projects to spend "residence periods" at the Center, for the purpose of spiritual refreshment and study. The Center is a pilot project. If it continues to experience the success it has had in the past, it is possible that similar centers will be set up in other rural areas.

CONCLUSION

Although there are only 12 million farmers -- representing only 6.4% of the total population⁴⁴-- 67 million Americans (35% of the total) live in towns of less than 10,000, apart from metropolitan areas and their suburbs.⁴⁵ The town and country apostolate is -- and is likely to remain -- an important area of the Church's concern.

Catholics may feel that they are facing the Protestant problem in reverse. From the point of view of Protestant witness, the town and country is over

44. Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1966 (Bureau of the Census), p. 616.

45. 1960 Census, vol. 1-A, p. 1:11. See also the detailed town and country population analysis made by the Methodist Division of National Missions, as reported in Methodism and the Mission in Town and Country, pp. 4 ff.

churched; from that of Catholic witness, under-churched. Yet, sharing as they do the same intense desire for the most effective Christian witness, Catholics -- within the limits of authentic ecclesiology -- will search for every point of contact with efforts that are likely to make this witness a success. In the words of the Second Vatican Council...

To the extent that their beliefs are common, they can make before the nations a common profession of faith in God and in Jesus Christ. They can collaborate in social and in technical projects as well as in cultural and religious ones. Let them work together especially for the sake of Christ, their common Lord. Let His Name be the bond that unites them! This cooperation should be undertaken not only among private persons, but also, according to the judgment of the Local Ordinary, among Churches or ecclesial Communities and their enterprises. [Decree on the Missions, n. 15.]

If Catholics are to apply these words of Vatican II to the situation in town and country today, then a great effort will be required. The challenge to the church is a serious one, and in their effort to meet this challenge, Protestant leaders are searching for solutions which they recognize to be both difficult and complex. A continuing brotherly interest on our part in the problems and progress of the Protestant town and country movement is one aspect of our own search for the most effective Christian witness.

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